

Felix Fluke

ACT I

Snow sprinkled the pine trees like powdered sugar. A highway slithered through crevices in the mountains. On the otherwise-still morning, a semitruck glided across the asphalt. Felix leaned into the passenger window of the truck, feeling the door press and release his torso with every winding turn. A mile marker caught his eye.

VOTSBORO

14

His bony legs, clad in a pair of black jeans, both bobbed on the carpet. His gray, oversized hoodie swallowed his white t-shirt like a shadow. A fringe of emerald hair hung in his face.

“Can we, uh. . .” ventured the boy, avoiding eye contact with the trucker, “can we listen to music or something?”

“I’m more of a talk radio guy myself,” the driver responded.

“That’s fine,” said the kid. “I’ll take anything that’s not more silence.” The trucker flipped to a random AM station. There a fatherly voice consoled a frantic, teenaged voice.

“It’s about realizing who you are, Melanie,” instructed the man.

“And I know my status as a daughter,” Melanie answered, starting her statement with an *and* as if her words were the continuation of a half-formed thought, “but I *just* want to now God’s will for my life.”

“Are you sure about that?” the kid blurted out. In response, the trucker erupted into laughter. “I’m serious,” protested the young passenger. “Learning grand, heavy truths about life can make you a heavy-hearted person.” The trucker silenced the radio.

“What would you know about ‘heavy truths’?” The younger one answered with a shrug:

“I’m just old enough to know a thing or two.”

“Are you chummy with God then?”

“He’s a good boss,” the boy answered, triggering another round of chuckles from his driver. The older man questioned him further:

“What exactly is your mission from God?”

“To drift from place to place, spreading good fortune wherever I go and reminding people that God hasn’t given up on them—that’s my mission. Sometimes it’s the small strokes of good fortune that make all the difference, you know?”

His acquaintance only shook his head, suppressed another outburst, and focused on his wrestling match with the steering wheel. The road came to a head at a cracked, pothole-ridden intersection. The welcome sign for Votsboro glared at them from the other side of the street. The trucker parked next to a gas pump and fumbled for his credit card.

“Don’t waste your money here,” the kid told him. Placing his hand on the dashboard, Felix caused every needle in the truck’s instrument cluster to glow with an emerald hue. A faint gurgle filled the gas tanks under their feet as the gasoline needle climbed from E to F. “I’ll see you in Heaven someday,” he told the older man before grabbing his water canteen and venturing into Votsboro. He walked around the back of the gas station, drumming on each of the dumpsters with his still-glowing fingers as he went. “Good luck, dumpster divers.”

Felix trekked through parking lots and open fields. Locals squinted at the outsider while providing lip service in the form of polite greetings. Many heads turned to observe the green-haired kid marching down the shoulder of the town’s main boulevard. His feet eventually found their way into a thicket, where a maroon tool shed stood guard at the edge of the trees.

Spotting an outcropping of rocks behind the shed, Felix proceeded to tap them with his fingers. Several of them replied with the tiny thud of a struck stone, but one greeted him with the crisp *thwack* of plastic. He parted the plastic stone into halves; it split perfectly along a fissure. Inside lay a single key on a bed of packing foam. Felix gained access to the shed, slipped the key into his pocket, and contorted his arm to re-fasten the shed's padlock from the inside. Then, he allowed his fatigue to overtake him.

The young traveler awoke to the all-to-familiar sound of handheld thunder. A slender column of light streamed through the shed's newly-formed peephole. Outside, brass clinked against the coarse dirt, followed by a courtesy call:

"You've got ten seconds to get outta there!"

Felix's hands trembled as he unfastened the lock. He shoved the shed doors aside and burst over the threshold. A girl in flannel greeted him with a pistol in hand.

"What were you doing in our shed?"

"I don't want any trouble," he blurted out. "My name is Felix, and I'm just a drifter who needed a place to stay." She eyed him for a minute, clutching her weapon, until she found spotted the fake stone.

"You want to come inside for some breakfast, stranger?"

"Wait. Really?"

The boy sat at the kitchen table, using a soup spoon to shovel eggs, bacon, and hash browns into his maw. The girl ate a sandwich with one hand and kept her gun trained on the interloper with the other.

"So, Felix," she began, "how exactly did you know where to find the spare key to our shed?" Felix explained:

“My grandparents owned this land before your family did. They’re the ones who originally bought the shed and the lock.”

“You still got kin in town?”

“Not anymore. I’m the last one.”

“Why did you run away?”

“I was being chased by . . . by my natural predator: Nils Seren.”



Seren’s hair, as red as the feathers of a cardinal, bowed to the will of his comb as he sculpted it into a classy side part. With the convenience store’s only bathroom occupied, he used the glass of the convenience stores refrigerator to inspect his black nylon jacket, the maroon undershirt that peeked through the unbuttoned top half of that jacket, and his black jeans.

“Hey, buddy!” yelled the cashier, “you gonna buy something or not?” Seren opened the fridge door and took out a four-pack of beer. Next to a plastic dish of pennies, a rack of bagged peanuts caught his eye.

“These any good?” he asked the employee.

“Honestly, bro, I’m allergic. It’s actually pretty bad.”

“Well, in *that* case,” Seren joked, playfully sliding the peanut display further away from the cash register.

“Nah, man. It’s all good as long as they stay in the bag.” He scanned the items’ barcodes.

“Anything else, sir?”

“Yes!” Seren pulled a photograph of Felix out of his pocket. “Have you seen this boy?”

The cashier glared at him.

“I don’t think I can tell you that,” the employee retorted. “Maybe he doesn’t want to be found.”

“He might not want it,” snapped Seren, “but his being found will be the best thing for him—for all of us.”

“Why don’t you just mind your business, OK?”

“Maybe you’re right,” murmured Seren.

He pretended to consider the advice for a second. Then he lobbed the bag of peanuts toward the cashier. A red blaze momentarily enveloped the bag, and it exploded into a cloud of peanut dust and shredded plastic. The cashier coughed and wheezed. He doubled over behind the counter.

“Hey!” a heavyset man hollered from the back of the store, “What kinda witchcraft was that?”

“The effective kind,” Seren replied coldly.

As the cashier’s limp form fell to the floor, the heavyset man brandished a butterfly knife. Seren casually picked a penny from the coin dish. The would-be vigilante charged. Seren tossed the penny like a miniature frisbee. The flying coin left a trail of red sparks in the air. It sailed at the perfect angle to slip in between the man’s lips and strike his uvula. He too started to gag. The knife dropped from his fingers. He started to stagger, securing himself against a store shelf. His forceful coughs caused his eyes to water. Seren grabbed two beer bottles, threw them in the air while walking down the store aisle, caught the bottles upside-down, and clubbed the man over the head with both of them. The bottles shattered, and the heavy man collapsed.

Seren noticed a set of SUV keys hanging from the man’s beltloop. “Well, friend,” he said, “I just treated you to some free drinks, so I’d say that you owe me a favor.” He picked up

the whole keyring. The young warlock then turned around to retrieve his picture from the counter, but the photograph was gone. In the distance, he heard the store's backdoor slam.



“Kate, how many times have I told you that gas station bathrooms are nast—?” Felix’s captor had set down her sandwich to take a call on her cell phone. She continued to half-heartedly threaten him with the pistol as her friend screamed into her ear through the device. “Are you OK?!” she inquired. “You should be more care. . . a flame-headed wizard?” She repeated the phrase in an incredulous tone. Felix’s eyes widened. He attempted to stand up, but her eyes drilled into his with a *watch yourself* glare.

“Do you have it in front of you right now? Yes? Well, what, uh . . .” her gaze bounced from Felix to the house’s front window and back to Felix. “What does the boy in the picture look like—exactly?” After a pause, the girl swore. “We *need* to get to my car,” she ordered Felix.

ACT II

“The cops found Kate hiding in a dumpster, ” the girl told Felix after the call had ended, “but the wizard kid was already gone.”

“I’m glad she’s safe,” Felix said.

“Yeah. Now let’s keep *ourselves* safe!” she exclaimed. “By the way, you can call me *Nancy*.” The car cruised along a dirt frontage road while Nancy and Felix got to know one another.

“What lead you to want to come back?” asked Nancy.

“The Boss Man spoke to me in a dream and told me to come back home.”

“Boss Man?”

“God,” he clarified.

“So, you’re religious, then?” she probed.

“Lucklets like me don’t have much of a choice.”

“What’s a ‘lucklet’?”

“We’re a subspecies of the Nephilim, which is a fancy way to say that we have a little angel blood in our veins. If a Nephil turns evil, that angel blood gets corrupted and becomes demon blood. Once an angel makes that fall and becomes a demon, there’s no going back. Demons and Nephilim with demon blood are basically going to Hell no matter what. That’s why Seren is so relentless. He has nothing left to lose except his power over others.”

“OK . . . Do folks call them ‘lucklets’ because they control luck or something?”

“Exactly.” Nancy smirked in response.

“Prove it, Halo Boy!”

“Alright! Take me to the nearest stoplight.”

Nancy found an intersection near the highway. She measured her speed so that the light turned yellow before she reached it. Felix’s hand, which had been hanging freely out of the passenger window, rose toward the traffic signal. A slender javelin of green fire shot from his palm into the signal. The yellow light reverted to green, and Nancy and Felix passed through the intersection.

“Shee-yoot!” sang Nancy. “You must never have to wait an the crosswalk, huh?”

“Well, not really. I can’t use my luck powers on myself. I *have* caught some lucky breaks on the road, though. I guess the Boss Man is looking out for me.”

“If he’s looking out for you, why is He letting Nils hunt you?”

“I don’t know. As far as I can tell, Nils either wants (A) to have my powers to himself or (B) kill me. If I was God, I’d stop him, but I’m not Him; I’m just one of his little lucklets. I have

a theory, though. I do think that God has some sort of master plan for everything, but the plan is *so* complicated that He's the only one who can fully understand the whole thing. At this point, I don't need to know the whole plan. I just need to know what my next move is gonna be. By the way . . . where are we headed?"

"The empty horse stables," replied Nancy. "My family owns several livestock pastures around Votsboro, but we haven't done any equestrian business in a good minute."

"Did you abandon the stables because of the economy?"

"Kinda. My dad's ex-wife—the woman he was married to before my mom—has done everything in her power to ruin our reputation around town. Most people don't want anything to do with us, so hired hands are hard to come by."

The warm hues of dusk blanketed the landscape as the two pulled up at the indoor stables. Nancy gave Felix a sleeping bag that she had been storing in the trunk of her car for emergencies. They got out and stood in the pool of light created by Nancy's headlamps.

"Happy trails," said Nancy. "It's been cool getting to know you, and I hope that the Boss keeps being kind to you."

"Right back at ya," responded Felix.

Nancy's car churned a pillar of dust into the twilight air as she departed. Felix settled into a horse stall, using an untied hay bale as a pillow. He awoke to the sight of a glowing, red handprint on the front door.

ACT III

Submitting to Seren's sorcery, the bolts in the door hinges crumbled to metal shavings, and Nils pushed the door over with only a light shove. The warlock grinned so widely that his smile forced him to squint.

“Nancy Granger? Really? You made friends with No-Good Nan? When I told people that you were with *her*, they were more than happy to help me track you down.” Seren doffed his nylon jacket, revealing the physique of a junior varsity athlete (with just enough muscle mass to inspire hubris in a teenage boy). His sleeveless undershirt allowed Felix to see luminous, crimson energy spreading through his blood vessels.

The fugitive boy scrambled to his bony feet. The collar of his shirt became a firepit as a column of emerald flames enveloped his head. A lime-colored inferno swallowed each hand.

“That’s it?” Seren taunted. “You’re gonna let me win without a fight?” Felix blasted two streams of green fire into the stables front wall. The wood rotten instantly. Felix’s new favorite sound grew nearer and nearer.

Before Seren could turn around, Nancy’s car crashed through the dilapidated planks. She swerved, and the backend of the vehicle knocked the dark lucklet off of his feet. Seren rolled backwards over the trunk and landed in a heap on the floor. Nancy held her pistol as she stepped out of the car.

“I had a nagging feeling that you still needed me,” she explained to Felix while leveling her gun at Nils.

“Squib load!” shrieked Seren. A single flame from his fingertips reached Nancy’s hand before she pulled the trigger. Her weapon clicked, but the bullet never left the gun barrel. Seren rose to one knee.

“You just don’t get it, Fluke!” said the predator. “I don’t give people bad luck; I drain the good luck out of them. Even if your energy isn’t intended for me, I can absorb it through the air. The closer you are, the faster I heal and the stronger I get!”

“I would’ve learned that sooner if you’d been able to catch me sooner,” quipped Felix. Seren masked his rage with a strained smile.

“First time for everything, bud! You!” Seren turned to Nancy. “Go back home. This doesn’t concern you.”

“No,” replied Nancy.

“Have it your way,” he said with a shrug.

Sprinting, Nils closed the gap between himself and Felix. The rival lucklets grabbed one another by the shoulders. Green energy reluctantly surged from Felix’s veins and arteries into Seren’s. Felix’s hair darkened in color; Seren’s beamed. Nancy shielded her eyes from the blinding light show.

“You knew this would happen eventually, Fluke! Admit it: your God wants me to win!”

The angelic lucklet gave no reply, but tightened his grip on the teenage sorcerer. Emerald sparks leapt out of Seren’s chest, soaking into Felix’s fingers. Locks of his hair faded from dark green to brown to orange to cardinal red. His white shirt glowed hot pink.

“What are you—?” cried Seren.

“I’M—TAKING—MY—LUCK—BACK!” A mixture of green and red energy filled the blood vessels of both lucklets. A small, furious vortex formed between them. Neither of them paid it any mind until it flattened and erupted as a colorless shockwave. The wave temporarily knocked the air out of both boys and propelled them backwards. Seren’s hair faded to blonde, and every hair on Felix’s head grew jet black. Seren lifted his eyes a little too late and caught a pistol-whipping from Nancy. He fell into the hay, and she holstered her weapon.

“How did you know that that would work?” Nancy asked Felix.

“I didn’t,” he said, struggling to stand. “Since our powers are polar opposites, I figured that maybe we could cancel each other out.”

“Did your angel blood spoil and turn into demon blood?”

“No,” Felix responded, “but it came dangerously close.” Less than ten feet away, a first responder’s siren wailed. Nancy and Felix turned to see a squad of cop cars approaching. Their blue-and-red blaze illuminated the property.



“So,” Felix began, drumming his fingers on the Granger kitchen table, “how does it feel to have the Votsboro cops side with you for once?”

“I’m not gonna lie; it’s pretty sweet. This town has finally found someone it likes even less than my clan. That’s enough about me, though . . .” She left the kitchen and returned with a stack of lined paper.

“Fill out your information on this.”

“What for?”

“This here is your official application to become the Grangers’ newest hired hand.” Felix could only sit in stunned silence, so Nancy continued. “You can live on this property as long as you want, but you have to do your share of the work.” The former lucklet smiled as he wrote out his full name: Felix Tyrese Fluke.

“*Tyrese*?!” Nancy teased. “That’s an awfully black name for such a pale fella, don’t ya think?”

“Yeah, well, some yard work’ll be good for my complexion.” He paused. “I’m gonna miss my powers, Nan, but I’m glad to know that I don’t always need them to make kind people more fortunate.”